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ABSTRACT

During the Autumn of 1975, Northwestern Michigan University Library undertook a survey of the amount of time necessary for the Library of Congress to fill orders for sets of catalog cards. The time outstanding was recorded for over 2000 orders. Response time varied between five and fifty-five weeks. It was concluded that use of Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) tapes through a bibliographic network could significantly reduce this lag time. (EMH)

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A SURVEY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CARD ORDER RESPONSE TIME

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Lydia M. Olson Library
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A SURVEY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CARD ORDER RESPONSE TIME

Between September 15 and December 15, 1975, the Northern Michigan University Library took a survey of the amount of time necessary for the Library of Congress to fill an order for a set of catalog cards. This survey was done in conjunction with a cost study of cataloging operations, and it was motivated by an impression that the amount of time needed to fill an order was unnecessarily long.

Since November 1974 the card order date has been recorded on all card-on-order records if that date is not the same as the book order date. This procedure yielded a large number of card sets for the sample, and it was a simple task to determine the date of the card order. When the cards were received, a record was made of the date received and card sets were tallied by the order date, thus giving the length of time the card orders had been outstanding. A count was also made of the number of orders the Library of Congress reported as being unable to fill, thus giving an approximation of the percentage of orders LC would not likely to be able to fill at all. Card sets bearing dates prior to November 1974 were excluded from the survey as the date was likely to be only the book order date. Only a small number of card sets fell into this category.

Reports were received from the Library of Congress for 2,281 orders during the survey. Of these, 179 (7.8%) were reports of cards being unavailable because the books had not yet been cataloged. Of the remaining 2,102 card sets, 40 (2%) were errors on the part of LC and 21 (1%) were errors on the part of Northern Michigan University. This left a balance of 2,041 usable card sets. The time data presented below includes these errors.

No cards were received before the fifth week, and the longest wait was fifty-five weeks. The number of cards received for each half week is shown in the appendix. The mean wait was 16.95 weeks, and the median wait was 15 weeks. The number of cards and percentage of cards received is summarized in Table 1.

The availability of cataloging data is further hindered by the slow publication schedule of the National Union

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Cards Received

Week	Number of cards	Percentage
4	0	0.0
5	106	5.0
8	625	29.7
13	961	45.7
17	1,139	54.2
21	1,312	62.4
26	1,623	77.2
30	1,878	89.3
34	2,017	96.0
39	2,082	99.0
55	2,102	100.0

Table 2

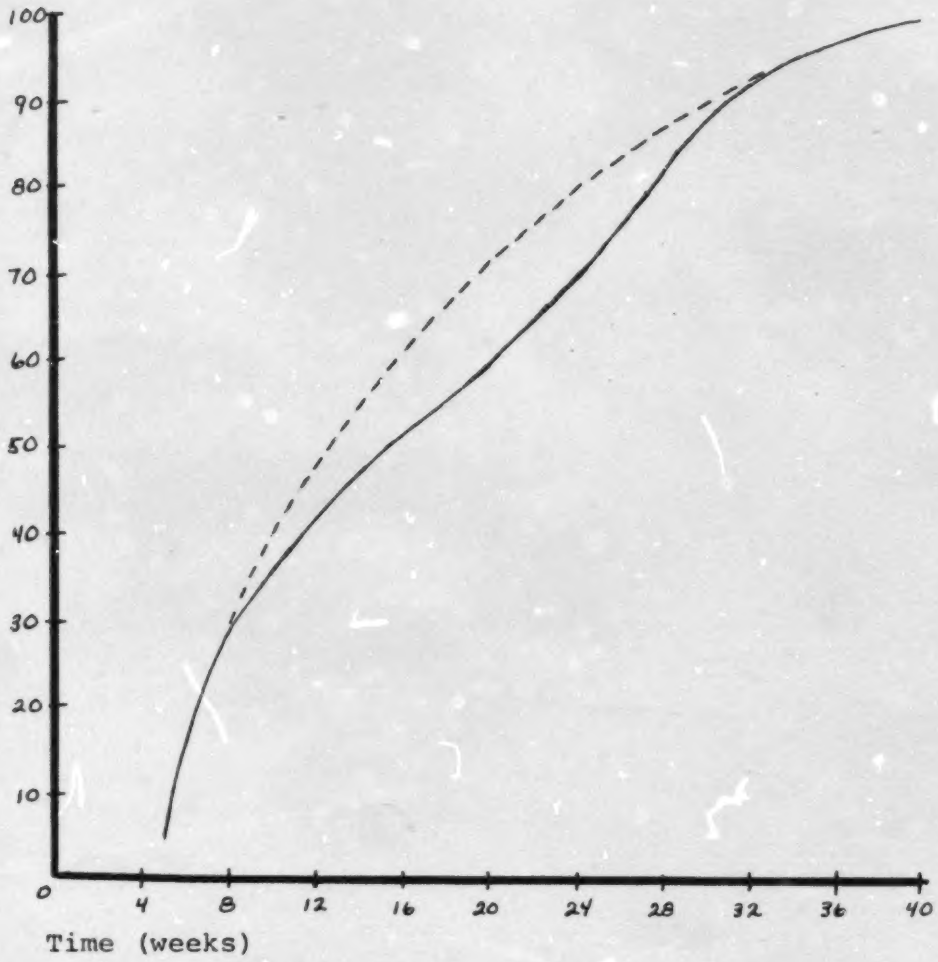
National Union Catalog Receipts

Issue date	Date received	Delay (mos.)
May 1975	Sept. 4	3
April-June 1975	Oct. 17	3.5
July 1975	Oct. 10	2.3
August 1975	Nov. 5	2
1974 cumulation:		
v. 1- 4	Sept. 16	
v. 5- 8	Oct. 2	
v. 9-12	Nov. 24	
Films:		
July-September 1975	Dec. 8	

Note: The July-September book cumulation and the remainder of the 1974 cumulation were received in January, after the survey had ended.

Catalog. The average wait for the NUC is 2.7 months. Table 2 shows the received dates for issues of the NUC received during the survey.

The data collected in this survey confirms the initial impression that there is a long wait for Library of Congress cards. This can only be partially explained by the slow publication schedule of the NUC, a necessary item for searching for LC copy. The rest of the answer lies in the procedures of the Catalog Distribution Service of the Library of Congress. The poor performance of LC between the tenth and twenty-eighth weeks (Fig. 1) indicates that another source of LC cataloging data must be found if the time waiting for data is to be reduced and service improved. The most logical source of that data is the MARC tapes produced



Expected response time (normal curve)
Actual response time

Fig. 1

Card Order Response Curve

weekly by the Library of Congress and available through the Ohio Colleges Library Center (OCLC) and other sources. Since tapes are added weekly, the data base would be only one week behind, not two to four months. In addition, dependence on the NUC would be lessened through the cooperative nature of any network. Thus it is logical to conclude that libraries

should give serious thought to any cooperative venture which would lessen the problem of cataloging data availability, even if the initial cost is somewhat higher than the present cost. Better service to the users should be the aim of all library operations.

APPENDIX

LC CARD ORDER RESPONSE TIME

Week	Card sets received	Total card sets received	Percentage	Week	Card sets received	Total card sets received	Percentage
5.0	106	106	5.0	25.5	28	1,591	75.7
5.5	223	329	15.6	26.0	32	1,623	77.2
6.0	35	364	17.3	26.5	37	1,660	79.0
6.5	118	482	22.9	27.0	45	1,705	81.1
7.0	29	511	24.3	27.5	23	1,728	82.2
7.5	20	531	25.3	28.0	41	1,769	84.2
8.0	94	625	29.7	28.5	25	1,794	85.3
8.5	12	637	30.3	29.0	27	1,821	86.6
9.0	43	680	32.4	29.5	24	1,845	87.8
9.5	19	699	33.2	30.0	33	1,878	89.3
10.0	72	771	36.7	30.5	19	1,897	90.3
10.5	71	842	40.1	31.0	26	1,923	91.5
11.0	31	873	41.5	31.5	18	1,941	92.3
11.5	24	897	42.7	32.0	23	1,964	93.4
12.0	34	931	44.3	32.5	7	1,971	93.8
12.5	8	939	44.7	33.0	20	1,991	94.7
13.0	22	961	45.7	33.5	11	2,002	95.2
13.5	12	973	46.3	34.0	15	2,017	96.0
14.0	37	1,010	48.0	34.5	13	2,030	96.6
14.5	26	1,036	49.3	35.0	5	2,035	96.8
15.0	61	1,097	52.2	35.5	11	2,046	97.3
15.5	4	1,101	52.4	36.0	6	2,052	97.6
16.0	19	1,120	53.3	36.5	8	2,060	98.0
16.5	9	1,129	53.7	37.0	8	2,068	98.4
17.0	10	1,139	54.2	37.5	3	2,071	98.5
17.5	9	1,148	54.6	38.0	6	2,077	98.8
18.0	33	1,181	56.2	38.5	3	2,080	98.9
18.5	17	1,198	57.0	39.0	2	2,082	99.0
19.0	20	1,218	57.9	40.0	3	2,085	99.2
19.5	21	1,239	58.9	40.5	1	2,086	99.2
20.0	22	1,261	60.0	41.0	1	2,087	99.3
20.5	19	1,280	60.9	41.5	2	2,089	99.4
21.0	32	1,312	62.4	43.0	2	2,091	99.5
21.5	31	1,343	63.9	44.0	1	2,092	99.5
22.0	35	1,378	65.6	44.5	4	2,096	99.7
22.5	24	1,402	66.7	45.0	1	2,097	99.8
23.0	50	1,452	69.1	48.0	1	2,098	99.8
23.5	23	1,475	70.2	50.0	2	2,100	99.9
24.0	26	1,501	71.4	52.0	1	2,101	99.9
24.5	38	1,539	73.2	55.0	1	2,102	100.0
25.0	28	1,567	74.5				